10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

The surface of the land presents much variety, a large part consisting either of moor and bog or of rocky hills, some of which reach a height of nearly 300 feet, but much of the soil is said to be of good quality. There are several small loughs in Inishbofin, lying in the hollows between the hills, and numerous wells and small rills which are kept well supplied by the frequent heavy rains. 133 [134]

The following description of the islands is given in the memoir of Sheet 83 of the Geological Survey.

With reference to Inishshark the authors say:—

"It is bleak and wild, rocky towards the west and north-west, while there is an envelope of drift on the eastern slopes. At the north-west shore are high and almost perpendicular cliffs.

"As the drift contains numerous angular and semi-angular blocks and fragments of local rocks, it is probably of moraine origin. . . . . On Inishshark there are igneous rocks. . . . identical with those which have been called melapyre by Mr. David Forbes. These occur in wide dykes, weathering much more rapidly than the associated schists, and form deep narrow ravines that have the local name of Boher-na-collig (*Anglice*, the road of the old hag or witch). . . . *Inishbofin* has a general E. and W. bearing; on the average it is four miles long and two wide, but the north and south coasts are indented with bays; and at Lough Bofin, from sea to sea, is not half a mile.

"The island consists of five hills, namely, Westquarter, its greatest height being 292 feet; it forms a promontory nearly separate from the rest of the island, being connected by the previously-mentioned low isthmus in which Lough Bofin is situated; Middlequarter, highest peak, 288 feet; Cloonamore, the N.E. hill having a height of 157 feet; Knock, the hill east of the harbour, 271 feet; and, Inishlyon, 143 feet, which is a tidal island, and separated from the other hills during high water. Most of the island is rocky, having a thin peat coating, except the valley of Boffin Harbour, where there is a considerable thickness of drift which gives the island a verdant aspect when viewed from the southward."

The climate is mild even in winter, frost being rare, and snow not lying if it should chance to fall; but these advantages are counterbalanced by the frequent fierce storms which often cut off all communication with the mainland for days, and by the heavy and long-continued rains. 132

The warmth and damp of the climate are probably due, to some extent, to the impinging of part of the Gulf Stream upon the islands, as several of the glass globes set afloat to test the current have been

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

extreme north point of the peninsula. Off this part of the coast lies Eagle Island, high and rocky in coast and surface, and a lighthouse-station. From Frenchport (or rather Annagh Head, its southern boundary) southward, the coast is sandy beach, shingle, and low rocks, and is backed to a large extent by rolling ranges of sandhills. Off this part of the coast lie Iniskea and Duvillaun, having a sandy or rocky shore, and a surface of no great elevation. The eastern shore along Blacksod Bay and Broadhaven is sheltered and low.

The surface of the Mullet does not reach any very great elevation, the highest point in the northern part being 410 feet above sea level, and the rounded granite hill of Tarmon, in the extreme south, 369 feet. It is much diversified, a good deal of it being fertile land, especially on the east side, but in the north part there is a good deal of bog and moor, and in the south and west rolling sandhills barely held in check by bent. In some of the narrower portions a fertile belt lies between two sandy ones.

The district of Portacloy is a wild mountainous region, with a coast of precipitous cliffs of great height, and riddled with caves. Benwee Head, which rises above the sea to the height of 1000 feet, is just outside the mouth of the deep narrow inlet which forms the harbour. The surface of this part of the district is very wild, and consists largely of bog and mountain. The climate is very mild, frost and snow being of infrequent occurrence and not lasting for long, but the rains are heavy and almost constant during the greater part of the year, and storms are frequent and severe.

Vegetation flourishes well, but, owing to the storms, trees are very few and only grow in sheltered localities.

The whole district is largely cut off from the outer world by the wide stretch of wild and sparsely peopled country through which the mail road from Ballina runs.[1]

III.—ANTHROPOGRAPHY.

1. *Methods.*—The methods employed did not differ to any great extent from those made use of on the two previous occasions. A few

[1] I am indebted to Mr. G. H. Kinahan, M.R.I.A., for the following note on the geology of the Mullet:—The south rough portion is granite, while the north rough portion is in part Archæan (*query, the equivalent of the Sutherland Algonkian rocks that have been called Old Bay*), and in part of Archæan quartzite (query, the equivalents of the Scotch Torridan Sandstone); while the central portion is occupied by schists of uncertain age that lie unconformably on the Archæan rock to the northward.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

1

The Island and Its Past

Prehistoric Period (9000 B.C. to 500 A.D.)

133 FORMED SINCE THE RETREAT over 12,000 years ago of the Weichsel glacier, Inis Beag consists of a block of limestone, Carboniferous in age, the geological axis of which is aligned northwest to southeast. The block has a gentle southwest dip, and its massive grey limestone strata are separated by narrow bands of water-bearing shales. There are two physical subdivisions in the island. On the northeast side, differential erosion has formed a series of terraces 133 separated by small cliffs a dozen or so feet in height. The greater share of good 134 arable land is found in this subdivision, where the shales have been broken down by weathering and alien soils deposited by wind and ice. These soils have been deepened artificially by the islanders through adding sand, seaweed, and compost. On the southwest side of Inis Beag is a more even surface, composed largely of pavement covered here and there by indigenous and manufactured soils, sloping from the 212-feet-high terrace crest almost as the dip of the strata to the Atlantic coast. The bare limestone surfaces are intersected in all directions by deep crevices, and in places the rocks form large slabs or are so fissured as to present a series of 133 vertical ridges. Found in the joints are most of the natural flora—herbs and shrubs [134]—of the island. The rocky appearance of the "back of the island" (see Fig. 1), as the people call this second subdivision, is accentuated by numerous granite and sandstone erratics dropped by the retreating glacier.

172 As yet no evidence of the Paleolithic has come to light in Ireland. The Mesolithic is dated from 6500 to 3000 B.C.; thus early man may have entered Ireland hard on the heels of the disappearing ice, as he did in other parts of Europe, crossing from the Continent on land bridges which then existed where the English Channel and Irish Sea now flow. A Neolithic period lasting only 1000 years existed in Ireland, and its artifacts at particular sites show a merging with earlier Mesolithic and later Copper-Bronze Age forms. Inis Beag contains a profusion of Copper-Bronze Age remnants, created before the coming of the Celts

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

size from fourths to quarter-acres, located along the quarter that his community fronts. As a result of past inheritance and purchase, however, five Castle villagers own plots in one or two other quarters, as do five High and two Low villagers. Before field building commenced, the most extensive and fertile soils were found on the terraces; shallow and less widespread soils were situated just south of the terrace crest, while the back of the island was, and still is, mostly limestone pavement. Landholders originally were assigned equal acreage in each of these three areas, so that no one would have an advantage over his neighbors, and this pattern still predominates. The quarters are separated from one another by high, thick stone fences which run almost the length of Inis Beag, and, from west to east, they are known as Quarter of the *Phoillín* (derivation unknown), Quarter of the Ridge of Huts (after an ancient *clochán* settlement behind High Village), Quarter of the Castle, and Quarter of the Lake; they embrace, respectively, 271, 261, 240, and 263 acres.

Fifty-nine of the 71 householders in Inis Beag hold or own land, and one of these is an absentee holder. If an individual possesses four or fewer acres, he is regarded as landless—"a man of few gardens"—and 11 men are so designated. Two as yet unresolved disputes over the possession of land when resolved will add two other householders to the landless category, unless the property is divided in some manner among all four litigants by the Irish Land Commission. The folk prefer to rent rather than to own land, so that the commission will supervise matters relating to inheritance "fairly" and with little cost to the litigants should a dispute arise. The average sized Inis Beag holding is 15.7 acres, or approximately a croggery, and 25 islanders hold this amount of land; in addition, one person has 40 acres, three 32 acres, one 28 acres, eight 24 acres, eight 20 acres, four 12 acres, and nine 8 acres. Below is a chart summing up ownership data by village:

	Landholders and Owners	*Landless Householders*	*Average Sized Holding (in acres)*
Low Village	17	9	11.0
High Village	14	1	18.2
Castle Village	15	2	19.0
Terrace Village	13	1	16.4

The disproportionate number of landless persons in Low are, for the most part, either descendants of fisherfolk who centered in that community in earlier times and did not possess land, or siblings of landholders who chose not to emigrate. They support themselves by craft work, keeping tourists, fishing, managing shops, and working for the government, among other pursuits.

Farming

There is neither legendary nor historical evidence of when soil building commenced in Inis Beag, but the process is an archaic one and is practiced in other communities along the Atlantic seaboard where appropriate seaweeds are available. Today, between 45 and 50 percent of the land surface of the island is

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

the major source of their livelihood; production is mainly for subsistence and is carried on with a simple technology, using the digging stick, spade, and scythe as primary implements; the island folk participate in a money economy, but barter still persists; a low standard of living prevails, and the birth rate is high; the family is of central importance, and marriage figures prominently as a provision of economic welfare; the island is integrated into the county and national governments and is subject to their laws; the people have long been exposed to urban influences and have borrowed cultural forms from other rural areas on the mainland, integrating them into a relatively stable system; and, finally, the experience of living under English rule for centuries has created in the islanders an attitude of dependence on—yet hostility toward—government which continues to this day. The only conditions in Inis Beag which run counter to those found in most other peasant communities are low death and illiteracy rates and bilateral, rather than unilineal, descent (although inheritance is patrilineal).

Inis Beag culture also characterizes people of nearby islands, and the traditions of the several together might be regarded as forming a subculture of the total Irish system. Many island customs are shared with rural peasants on the mainland (where numerous regional subcultures exist), and some are part of a broader European matrix. The island has experienced considerable cultural change since the establishment of the Congested Districts Board (forerunner of the Gaeltacht) in 1891 and the growth of tourism in this century. But conditions there still approximate those which must have prevailed two generations ago, and earlier, throughout this region of peasant Ireland.

Inis Beag has a population of approximately 350 persons living in seventy-one "cottages" distributed among four settlements, called "villages." Bordering a "strand" and a large tract of common land on the northeastern side of the island are a series of limestone terraces, separated by water-bearing shales and faced by small cliffs, on which the villages are situated. Most of the arable land is found on this side, where the shales have been broken down by weathering and alien soils deposited by wind and by ice of the Weichsel glacier. Over many generations, the islanders have deepened these soils and created new soils on rock surfaces by adding seaweed, sand, and human manure. On the southwestern side of Inis Beag, known as the "back of the island," limestone pavements slope rather evenly, almost as the gentle dip of the strata, from the crest of the highest terrace to the sea a mile away. The bared surfaces are intersected in all directions by crevices,